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SUBJECT: BASESCU ANNOUNCES IRAQI TROOP REDUCTION

Classified By: DCM Mark A. Taplin for Reasons 1.4 (A), (B) and (D)

¶1. (U) Summary. On the evening of August 30, President Basescu announced that Romania would reduce its troop presence in Iraq over the next two months, as Iraqi forces take control of areas currently under the command of coalition forces. He emphasized in his public remarks that this was not a withdrawal, but a decision to reduce, and that the decision was taken following close consultations with the Iraqi authorities and Romania's partners. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Basescu's remarks were made to Romanian ambassadors gathered in Bucharest for their annual conference. Basescu told Charge at a subsequent reception that he decided to announce the reduction following Iraq's announcement that the Dhi-Qar district would come under Iraqi authority and consultations with the British.

¶3. (C) National Security Advisor Medar on the morning of August 31 called Charge to provide more detail on what Basescu had told the Romanian chiefs of mission the previous evening. Medar said Basescu made the announcement in terms that were "flexible", per discussions with UK officials and Deputy NSA J.D. Crouch. The Romanian president emphasized that subject to continuing consultation with coalition partners and the GOI, Romanian troops would be available for redeployment. Basescu made the point that a reduction would certainly take place, but underscored that it was consistent with the earlier reduction of Romanian troop levels from over 800 to the current level of 628. The process would continue, according to Medar's account, "according to the strategic situation in Iraq."

¶4. (C) As background, Medar said the cue for the timing of Basescu's announcement was UK Defense Minister Browne's August 25 statement in Iraq that Dhi Qar would be the second of four provinces under UK command in southern Iraq to be handed over to the government. Medar reemphasized that the Romanian troops would be ready for redeployment, and Bucharest would continue to consult closely with Washington. He and Charge agreed that early Romanian media reports had mostly drawn the right conclusion, ie. that the announcement represented a reduction and not a withdrawal.

¶5. (C) Comment: Basescu's announcement will help take some steam out of the attempt by Defense Minister Atanasiu and his Liberal party allies to promote a pull-out from Iraq wholesale. Basescu can play up the move as that of a good and trustworthy ally and partner. It is noteworthy that despite some media commentary to the contrary, Basescu went out of his way with the Romanian ambassadors -- as well as the foreign envoys assembled at the evening reception -- to stress that the strategic direction and priorities for Romanian foreign policy are the same now as they have been, and would not change "until the end of my presidency." "No

changes," he exclaimed, concluding his remarks for the diplomatic corps in English. This clearly included the same strong commitment to NATO and our strategic partnership.

End Comment.

Taubman